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B. L. Bowen

French in Ohio High Schools and Colleges

BY

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## FRENCH IN OHIO HIGH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES.

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THE question which I wish to consider in the present paper is a simple one: Is the position of French in the courses of our Ohio High Schools and Colleges as prominent as it should be? Does not this language deserve a more generous recognition than it at present receives? Can it not be made of greater educational value as a study? My plea is for more time, and for better and more adequate results.

It is somewhat surprising that, in a State which has so many flourishing high schools as has the State of Ohio, so comparatively little attention should be given to the study of French. It would even seem that in general, the subject is well-nigh disregarded. A generous number, I think a representative number, of our high schools devote some time to the study of German. Only a very few of them admit French. In from thirty to forty of them, if not more, courses in German are offered. As far as I am able to learn, there are not more than five or six of the Ohio high schools which have made any provision for instruction in French. I hold that equal recognition should be accorded these languages, that they should be placed on absolutely the same footing in our high schools.

There are several circumstances which have heretofore influenced the teaching of these two languages in Ohio, and have helped to determine their present relative positions. The fact of the large German-speaking population in our State, with the attendant effects upon legislation, is manifestly the first cause of the preference that has been shown the German language. The influx of German-speaking people has helped to give the language a popular and practical character which the French has enjoyed to a much less degree. It has been considered the correct, if not the necessary thing, to acquire some practical acquaintance with the German. It has been easy to secure teachers of German; or at least it has been easy to find persons to teach German who had a speaking knowledge of the language, or who spoke it as their native language. As the French do not emigrate, French-speak-

ing people have been fewer among us, and teachers of the language, at least native teachers, have been less readily secured. French then has seemed less popular. It has tended perhaps to assume the position of a luxury rather than a practical necessity. The fact that German is considered the more difficult language of the two, has also, doubtless, contributed in some cases to the neglect of French, or has caused a greater amount of time to be devoted to German.

These are perhaps some of the most evident reasons why French has thus far received so much less attention than German in the schools of our State. It seems to me that such reasons should no longer influence us at the present day. The question of the comparative difficulty of the two languages is one that ought not to have weight in in favor of either; for while the German vocabulary may, for the average American student, offer more difficulties at the outset than the French, this is fully counter-balanced later on by the varied character, the long and continued history, the volume and merit of the French literature. The question of available teachers is one that can really present very little difficulty, and should have no influence in excluding French from our high schools. While the number of people among us who speak German as their native language, or the language of the family, is manifestly very much greater than the number of those who so speak French, in the matter of persons who have an adequate knowledge of the language, and who know how to impart what they possess, the discrepancy on the side of the French is by no means so noticeable. Within ten or twelve years a very marked improvement has been made in the teaching of French in the colleges of the United States as a whole. The college in which I, myself, was formerly a student, (one of the smaller colleges of the East), has advanced from two terms of French offered in 1881 to two years, or six terms, offered at present. I judge that the average college graduate of to-day is much more likely to have had some training in French than the graduate of even four or five years since. I know that this is the case at the institution with which I am connected. It ought not to be a difficult matter now to secure readily for our high schools bright young men or women, who, while they may not speak French with the fluency of a native, have had an adequate amount of training in the language and its literature, and who have above all, the ability to impart successfully what they do know. There are without doubt at

present, among the corps of instructors in many of our high schools, one or more persons of sufficient training to conduct, competently, a course of one or two years in French, if such course were admitted.

In the teaching of French, the high schools of Ohio are much behind those of various neighboring states. German has still the lead in the majority of the states to the west of New England, but in nearly all of those states which can at all compare with Ohio in wealth and population, the number of persons studying French is relatively larger, often much larger, than with us in Ohio. In fact there are but very few states, perhaps half a dozen, in the entire Union, which can show a worse or more unfair condition of things as between French and German than is shown by the high schools of Ohio. Recent statistics from the "Report of the Commissioner of Education" give the total number of students pursuing French in the public high schools of Ohio as 253, while the total number studying German is 2774. If we compare these figures with those of several neighboring states, we find French at a much less disadvantage :

| PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS. | STUDENTS STUDYING |         |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------|
|                      | FRENCH.           | GERMAN. |
| Michigan.....        | 291               | 1316    |
| Illinois.....        | 457               | 2048    |
| New York.....        | 986               | 2778    |
| Minnesota.....       | 258               | 767     |
| Virginia.....        | 180               | 385     |
| Maryland.....        | 53                | 62      |

If we turn to the states of New England, where the influence of the Canadian French is strong, and where other evident influences contribute, we find that the above proportions are almost reversed. French is relatively well cared for in the high schools of the Eastern States :

| PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS. | STUDENTS STUDYING |         |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------|
|                      | FRENCH.           | GERMAN. |
| Massachusetts.....   | 5703              | 1357    |
| Maine.....           | 579               | 29      |
| Connecticut.....     | 453               | 745     |
| New Hampshire.....   | 406               | 37      |
| Rhode Island.....    | 279               | 47      |
| Vermont.....         | 195               | 51      |

In the South, too, French has often an advantage which it does not enjoy in this locality. This is especially true in the high schools of Georgia, South Carolina and Louisiana.

These general facts touching the teaching of French and German in the high schools of the various states make it evident that Ohio is doing very much less for French than her prominent position as a State justifies. If we compare the cases of individual high schools, we discover details which show still more clearly how marked this discrepancy is. For instance, if we take the State of Michigan to the north of us, we find that in the Detroit High School, French and German are upon an equal footing, four semesters (two years) being devoted to each, while in the Central High School of Cleveland, four years are allowed, for German and French is not taught at all. At the seat of the State University of Michigan, in the Ann Arbor High School, two years' instruction is given in both French and German, while at the seat of the Ohio State University, in the Columbus High School, French is not recognized at all and four years are devoted to German. I am aware that at the capital of Michigan, in the Lansing High School, no French is at present offered, but the Principal assures me in a recent letter that French will be added to the course and placed on the same footing as German, giving a two years' course in each.

If we turn to the State of New York, we find that there also French fares better in the high schools than here with us. In the Buffalo High School, while three years are always given to German, always two, and sometimes three years, are devoted to French. In the Utica High School (Academy) three years are given to each language. And in the Albany High School, the two languages are likewise upon the same footing, four years being allowed for each.

I plead then for more French in the high schools of our State, for a more just division of time between the German and the French. I think it is not asking too much at the present day to require that the two languages be placed on absolutely the same basis. Where German is now optional with Latin, let French be given the same privilege. Certainly some advance can be made by which French may at least be recognized in the large number of schools where now only German is taught. There is enough need of improvement when two such prominent cities as Cleveland and Columbus make no provision for the teaching of French in their high schools.

Turning to the question of collegiate instruction in French in our State, we find something, indeed much, that is encouraging, but we find also that there is room for much improvement. The subject of French has as yet failed to receive the consideration which it merits. I am convinced, from an examination of the college catalogues of Ohio, that the instruction in French can and should be materially broadened and improved.

There are, I think, at the present day, almost no colleges worthy of the name, which do not give some opportunity for the study of both German and French. In too many cases, however, these languages are still made elective only, especially in the course leading to the degree of B. A. I regret to say that in the institution with which I am myself connected, this condition of things prevails. The B. A. graduate may go forth without having studied a word of either French or German. The same is true of other colleges in the State. This seems to me unfortunate. I may be in the wrong, but it has been for some years, and still is, my firm opinion that every student taking the degree of B. A. should be required to have an elementary knowledge, that is, a fair reading knowledge, of both German and French. The general culture which a liberal education pre-supposes demands this. Such a claim may have been recognized for some time as theoretically a just one, but among us here it has certainly not yet been generally admitted in practice. In 1884 President Eliot of Harvard wrote: "The philologists, archaeologists, metaphysicians, physicians, physicists, naturalists, chemists, economists, engineers, architects, artists and musicians all agree that a knowledge of these languages (French and German) is indispensable to the intelligent pursuit of any one of their respective subjects beyond its elements." And less than two years ago President Gilman (*Educ. Rev.*; Feb., 1892) expressed his view of the matter still more pointedly when he said: "A liberal education absolutely requires that every English-speaking person should have a knowledge of French and German also; for it is from the French and German that in these days we receive the most important contributions to literary and physical science." This condition of things is realized to a fuller extent in the eastern colleges than in those of this section. I hope that we may be able in the near future so to shape our schedules that every B. A. graduate will have had the benefit of an elementary training in both of these languages.

As we recognize both French and German in our colleges, my next plea is that equal recognition should be given them, that they should be placed upon an absolutely equal footing. I referred above, in speaking of the high schools, to some predisposing conditions which have been favorable to German rather than to French. I think that such conditions should certainly not influence collegiate instruction. At present a decided preference seems to be given to German in the colleges of Ohio. In almost no instance is more time allotted to French than to German, while the time devoted to German is in some cases twice and even three times as much as that allowed for French; or else German is given the preference by being required, while French is elective. A comparison of the courses in some twenty of the principal colleges of our State, shows that the average amount of time allowed for French is about two and one-seventh years, while the average time devoted to German is about two and seven-tenths years. In only about half of the Ohio colleges is French given absolutely equal recognition with German. In about half a dozen colleges the time given to German is fully double that given to French. We need then, in the first place, more time for French. There should be a more equitable adjustment between the two modern languages. Both should be made equally prominent, and then the time for both extended as the teaching force may permit it.

The question of methods in the collegiate teaching of French, or modern languages, may rightly be considered a hackneyed one. It has been a favorite subject of discussion in language associations for some time past, and all that could be said on the one side or the other seems to have been said. I have no wish to revive the discussion, but I cannot refrain, in view of what I shall say later, from expressing my firm belief in the adaptability of the grammar and reader method to the needs of instruction in our college classes. The natural method may accomplish one thing; the grammar and reader method accomplishes another. Indeed, the whole question turns, not upon which method accomplishes more effectively the same purpose, but upon the comparative merits of two different purposes which the two methods may accomplish. The question is simply, shall we make it our main business in teaching to secure to our college student ability to speak the language, just as we would teach him any other trade, just as we would teach him to write shorthand, or to operate the tele-

the courses as laid down in the catalogues of our Ohio Colleges, shows that this tendency is somewhat prevalent among us. In one instance a comedy of Molière is, or has been, scheduled for the first term of the study of French. In another, "classic authors" have been read the second term, and the *Phèdre* of Racine is studied the third term. Again the tragedy of *Athalie* is taken up during the third term of the study. Or La Fontaine is introduced at the same stage of the work. Let me say freely that I believe this is unwise. The classic master-pieces should in all cases be left until the student has gained some acquaintance (and the more the better) with nineteenth century literature, where he is brought into contact with the words and ideas of every-day life. Even if the course in French must be limited to one year, I should say unconditionally that it is much better to leave the seventeenth century out of account entirely, and devote the time to the reading of contemporary authors. My own experience has suggested to me more and more the propriety of giving precedence to the literature of the nineteenth century during all of the first two years of the students' course in French, and of postponing, as long as possible, the study of such master-pieces as *Le Cid*, *Le Misanthrope*, *Athalie* and *Andromaque*. Especially should Racine be left till the last. As he is, in the minds of many critics, the one author who, in his best work, is "quite perfect," so he is just the one whom the student, when practically a beginner, is least capable of rightly appreciating. The French of the seventeenth century, we of course call modern French, but only by contrast with the old French. A student must be able to read nineteenth century French with ease before he can appreciate the qualities of language in the seventeenth century writers. And then, he must be of tolerably mature mind before he is in a condition to assume the point of view of those seventeenth century dramatists, and to enjoy intelligently the beauties of that artificial product known as the classic French tragedy. I believe then that we should lighten the tragedy perhaps more than we do, and that, in justice to our students, still more in justice to the authors, we should exclude La Fontaine, Corneille, Molière, Racine from our elementary work, from that stage of our work in which they would have to serve as mere reading exercises.

And in our teaching of the literature, in the survey of different authors, epochs or schools, we should make use, as much as possible, of the element of comparison. No author or epoch can be fully under-

stood and appreciated without being brought face to face with other authors or epochs. The importance of this method is usually conceded, but it is not, I think, always emphasized as it deserves to be in our college courses. Prominently in the subject of the French drama, does comparative study add interest and zest to the work, and bring out more pointedly for the student the qualities of the different schools. I judge that the average college student, who usually approaches such a writer as Corneille with some preconceived notions on the subject of the English drama, will discover in the classic French drama taken by itself little of a character to arouse in him anything more than a very mild degree of interest. But if this drama is placed in direct contrast with the later romantic drama, the student's interest in the former is materially increased, and the peculiarities of both schools seem more real to him. So I would not take up entirely apart, by itself, such a masterpiece as *Horace* or *Cinna*, but in immediate connection with a play like *Hernani*.

I have indicated above the importance of the study of literature in our collegiate work in French. Literature and literary history are and always will be of prime interest. On the other hand, linguistic history is also of prime interest and deserves a share of recognition which it has not yet received. I believe that the teaching of French in our Ohio colleges as a whole could be rendered much more efficient and raised to a much higher level by the introduction of a more essentially historical basis for all collegiate work. I know the rebuff which such a claim for historical methods has met with. We are told that such special study is not possible at the collegiate stage, that philological work belongs only to the post-graduate courses of the University; and editors of college texts who attempt even very mild philological treatment in their annotations have been met with the cry of "unnecessary erudition," "misplaced knowledge," and the like. Notwithstanding this the "historical" point of view *has* made progress during the last few years, and is, I trust, in a fair way to make further progress here among us in Ohio. We do not need nor wish to introduce special philological research into the college, but we may fairly assume that every intelligent student is interested in understanding the causes of the phenomena with which he is becoming familiar or has learned to use. We should do all in our power to give him a general understanding of such phenomena. If we can from the outset keep steadily

before him the growth of form and expression, emphasizing the resemblances to modes of expression already familiar to him, and gradually formulating for him the most essential principles of word change, the student will come to take a new interest in the subject, the language will seem less mechanical to him, since he will be able to see something of philosophy in it and to regard it as a living product (Elliott).

It is evident that historical treatment can be introduced more readily and made more effective in classes which have had some training in Latin. And so from the beginning our classes in French should be divided on the basis of Latin and non-Latin students. The matter of general progress is, as we know, intimately connected with such a principle of classification. Unfortunately, many of us are, I judge, still unable to proceed entirely upon this basis. But even if the student has had no groundwork in Latin, enough Latin is usually present in his English to enable him to grasp the general relations which we may wish to emphasize. So in the editing of French texts for later work in college, I am in favor of a prudent amount of scientific treatment, of etymological reference, and I am gratified to note that recent editors of such texts are justly recognizing this feature. It should ever be borne in mind in our teaching of French that we cannot too soon nor too frequently indicate correlations and deductions, and that in the historical treatment of language development, as of literary development, is found the surest basis of a broad culture.

The features of pronunciation, composition and conversation in our collegiate teaching of French I have emphasized little in this discussion, because I believe them of inferior educational value as compared with the subjects treated above. They have an importance, however, and a place in college work. My own views as to this more practical side of the subject are briefly these: A reasonable amount of time should be spent at the start in teaching the pronunciation, a longer time with French than with German, because of its differing more widely from English pronunciation and because of more numerous irregularities. Attention will have to be called frequently to these irregularities. But as for the sounds themselves, students who will ever learn to pronounce French with reasonable correctness, will usually do so in the first week. There may be, I believe there often are, some students in a college class who will never learn to pronounce French very respectably, and I doubt the propriety of keeping the

class back to labor with such. In the matter of composition and conversation, I believe that these features should receive a due share of attention in the more advanced classes. I conceive that the main business of the first year is certainly to read, that is translate, as much as possible. After the first year I endeavor to devote one hour a week to exercises in composition and conversation. I believe that the composition should as far as practicable be based on the reading.

But in all our work we can not, I think, keep too firmly in mind that our chief business is educational, that the education we furnish is not to include special investigation on the one hand nor the learning of a trade on the other, and that whatever gives the best mental training, whatever gives general culture, should in all cases be preferred.

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The following articles have been referred to and quoted from in the present paper :

“Modern Languages as a College Discipline,” by Professor A. Marshall Elliott.

“Observations Upon Method in the Teaching of Modern Languages,” by Professor Calvin Thomas.

“Reading in Modern Language Study,” by Professor Edward L. Joynes.

“How to Use Modern Languages as a Means of Mental Discipline,” by Mr. E. H. Babbitt.

“The Aim and Scope of the Study of Modern Languages and Methods of Teaching Them,” by Professor O. B. Super.

“On the Use of the Foreign Language in the Class-room,” by Professor H. C. G. von Jagermann.











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